

4. 7.20

(Tuesday of Holy Week)

Our Gospel reading for today, Tuesday of Holy Week, is taken from chapter 13 of John's Gospel. It places us at a dinner which Jesus will not celebrate until later on this week, on Thursday, which in John's Gospel is the eve of the Jewish feast of Passover. Yesterday's Gospel, also from John, also placed us at a dinner held six days before Passover in Bethany at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. So both these Gospel readings from John for these first two days of Holy Week place us at dinners. They tell us that the Lord was "out for dinner" in Bethany six days before the Feast of Passover (a Saturday night!) and one day before it on Thursday in Jerusalem.

Normally dinners with friends are joyous occasions, but here, at both dinners just six days apart, the clouds are gathering. At the dinner in Bethany Judas, one of the guests, complains about the amount of money wasted on the expensive oil Mary used to wash Jesus' feet at this dinner, but Jesus defends her by saying that she has prepared him for his burial. Not a very happy note. And here at the meal in Jerusalem six days later, on the eve of Passover, Jesus speaks of his being betrayed and even identifies Judas as the

betrayed by giving him a dipped morsel and telling him to do quickly what he is going to do. But only the disciple physically closest to Jesus at this supper knows what Judas' acceptance of this morsel and the command given with it means. The others present, we are told, simply took it as Jesus' command to Judas to take care of some practical detail.

Judas appears at both dinners, although at the second dinner he does not speak. But actions speak louder than words. He took the dipped morsel. He understands what doing this means, and he does it. He is ready to betray Jesus. But we, the readers, know the meaning of the gesture, for we are told: "So Judas took the morsel and left at once. And it was night" (Jn 13:30).

But Judas is not the only disciple present at this meal who is walking into the darkness. The other one is Peter, and he is portrayed here as we usually imagine him to be. He is big on promises. Here he tells Jesus, "I will lay down my life for you." Jesus' response is quick and simple: "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times" (Jn 13: 38).

We all think we know our friends. We know how they will react to situations. Once in awhile they surprise us, but normally we are on the money. They react as we could have told anyone they would. So too with Jesus and Peter here. Jesus knows Peter and he knows how Peter will react under pressure. And, as we know, he will prove to be right. With that understanding of Jesus' understanding of us, perhaps our prayer now could be something like this: "Lord Jesus, you know me, you know my weaknesses, you know I say things and then don't follow through with what I have said. Help me after I fall, for I am sure I will, to pick myself up and try again. Peter did that. Help me to follow you by following him in his willingness to move on after falling. Amen."